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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Iran: Nuclear Program
- [3](#). Iraq

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that on Thursday, a Qassam rocket landed 2 km south of Ashkelon, in an area that comprises strategic installations, and another in a kibbutz in the area. Israel Radio reported that Israel has conveyed a message to the PA on the issue of Qassam and mortar launchings, but that the PA did nothing to stop them. Leading media reported that the IDF is bracing for a tough response in the Gaza Strip. The radio reported that last night the IDF bombarded 13 roads that served as access roads for Qassam launchings, and that it arrested six Islamic Jihad activists in the West Bank. Leading media reported that on Thursday, IDF troops thwarted an attempt by terrorists to blow up an explosives-laden car in a tunnel on the Jerusalem-Etzion Bloc road. Leading media cited Palestinian claims that Palestinians had informed the IDF about the car. At noon, Israel Radio reported that an Israeli was severely wounded in a drive-by shooting in the southern Hebron hills.

Ha'aretz, Yediot, and The Jerusalem Post reported that, contrary to earlier reports and assessments, Mofaz decided on Thursday not to allow the operation of convoys from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank next week. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted sources in Mofaz's office as saying that the operation was only being postponed. Yediot cited the anger of members of the defense establishment toward the U.S. representatives who are holding negotiations with Israel on the issue. Yediot quoted one defense official as saying that U.S. intervention constituted interference in Israel's sovereignty.

All media (lead stories in Ha'aretz and Maariv) reported on, or predicted Hamas's landslide victories in the local elections held on Thursday in Nablus, Jenin, and Al-Bireh, which is next to Ramallah. Maariv bannered an assessment by Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin that Hamas could beat Fatah in next month's Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. The Jerusalem Post reported that efforts by Palestinian politicians were underway on Thursday to persuade jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti to abandon his decision to run in the PLC elections as the head of the new list Al-Mustaqbal (The Future).

Yediot quoted associates of PM Sharon as saying that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz would not retain his post after the elections, because he would have to pay for his political mistakes and his ingratitude. Yediot quoted associates of Likud leadership candidate MK Binyamin Netanyahu as saying that, should Netanyahu win in Monday's party primaries, the party would quit the

government. The newspaper cited the belief of Likud officials that, if elected Likud chairman, FM Silvan Shalom intends to leave the party in the government. Shalom was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that Netanyahu is too soft on the PA. All media reported that Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz's campaign manager Motti Morel implied on Thursday that Sharon was using targeted killings for election purposes, which in turn has intensified the cycle of violence in the area. The media quoted Peretz as saying on Thursday that Morel's statements only represent the campaign manager's opinion. The Jerusalem Post reported that New Rochelle, N.Y., native and Jerusalem resident Mitchell Barak is running as a Knesset candidate for the Likud party.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that on Thursday, a group of Lebanese nationals -- the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) -- filed a civil suit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia against former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon. Ya'alon, who is currently in the U.S., as a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, is being sued for his role in the killing or injury of hundreds of residents of the Lebanese village of Kafr Kana during the 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath. Ha'aretz reported that CCR attorney Jamil Dakwar told the newspaper that the amount of compensation would be determined by the jury at the trial. Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that last week, CCR and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights filed a class-action lawsuit against former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter. The lawsuit was submitted on behalf of the family members of 14 Palestinians who were killed when the IDF dropped a one-ton bomb on a Gaza neighborhood in July 2002 during the targeted killing of Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh. The compensation sought in that case is estimated in the millions of dollars. Ha'aretz notes that, unlike previous suits for damages against senior Israeli officials, the suits submitted against Ya'alon and Dichter will be processed by the U.S. courts because the two are currently staying in the U.S.

Leading media reported that on Thursday, the state told the High Court of Justice that illegal Jewish squatters in Palestinian shops in Hebron's wholesale market will be evicted by mid-February.

Yediot reported that Transportation Minister Meir Sheetrit and his Moroccan counterpart Karim Ghellab, who met in Marrakech on Thursday, at a EU-sponsored conference of transportation ministers from the Mediterranean countries, decided to resume regular flights between Israel and Morocco.

Visiting former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Thomas Pickering was quoted as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz, which encompassed all Middle East issues and U.S.-Israel relations, that the plight of Syrian President Bashar Assad is Israel's opportunity to end the conflict with Syria.

Yediot reported that on Thursday, Archbishop Christodoulos, Greece's top cleric, dubbed Israel "hell" at a religious ceremony in Athens.

Ha'aretz and Yediot quoted Netanyahu as saying on Thursday, in a speech to an Israel Bar Association conference in Tel Aviv, that he had recently rejected an offer by leading Italian industrialist Carlo De Benedetti to serve as Italy's finance minister. Yediot quoted De Benedetti as saying Thursday that his offer had been made in banter.

Maariv translated an article by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ("The Promise of Democratic Peace") that originally appeared last Sunday in The Washington Post and opposes the idea that ethnic values could prevent the advent of democracy in the world.

The results of polls in Yediot and Maariv show that Kadima retains its strength. Yediot's survey predicts 38 Knesset seats for Kadima (Maariv: 39), 23 for Labor (Maariv: 22), and 11 for Likud (Maariv: 13 under Netanyahu, 11 under Shalom)

The Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll found that 49 percent of Israelis favor the division of Jerusalem; 49 percent are opposed to it. 56 percent believe that Sharon will divide Jerusalem. This survey also found that 58 percent of Israelis believe that Iran's construction of a nuclear reactor should be addressed through diplomatic means, while 36 percent favor its destruction in a military operation.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Gayer's exposure of the truth should not upset Sharon."

Nationalist Hatzofe editorialized: "This time, it is not only the opposition that is hurling criticism at ... the inconsiderate capitulation to the United States, which involves very serious dangers to Israel's peace and security."

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The 'revolution of the young Palestinians' in Fatah, headed by Marwan Barghouti, which led to the defeat of Abu Mazen and the members of his generation, dealt a stinging defeat in the municipality elections on Thursday."

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Had Fatah's leaders been wise enough to integrate the young guard into their electoral slate, they would at least have had a chance to stop Hamas. Now, the situation appears more problematic."

Dr. Jonathan Spyer, a research fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "'Unilateralism' involves the interaction of two partners. Those partners are Israel and the United States."

Block Quotes:

I. "A Time For New Concessions"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 16): "Kalman Gayer, the Prime Minister's adviser on public opinion polls, was accurate when he told Newsweek that in a final-status agreement, Sharon would agree to a far-reaching compromise in ... Jerusalem and a concession over 90 percent of the territories.... Sharon would do well to stand behind [Gayer's] remarks.... An opening gambit that would leave the settlement blocs in the territories fortified behind the separation fence would constitute a basis for negotiations with the Palestinians over a final-status agreement. This is what Dr. Yossi Beilin and Amir Peretz are proposing. But there's no Palestinian leader, not even Abu Mazen or Marwan Barghouti, who can at this time give up the return of the 1948 Palestinian refugees to Israel in its Green Line borders. Therefore, Gayer's exposure of the truth should not upset Sharon. In actual fact, a unilateral withdrawal to the separation fence would advance the final status. During [Sharon's] next term Jerusalem will be out of the game. And later? 'God is great,' as the saying goes both in Hebrew and Arabic."

II. "Sharon Has Surrendered to U.S. Pressure"

Nationalist Hatzofe editorialized (December 16): "Following Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's demand, Israel has accepted to allow movement of buses between the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank, first in a limited fashion -- five buses a day -- and later freely, after an agreement is reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.... This is yet another inconsiderate concession by Sharon's government at a time when terrorism is increasing. This time, it is not only the opposition that is hurling criticism at the ... move by the Prime Minister and his Defense Minister, but also members of the cabinet, over the inconsiderate capitulation to the United States, which involves very serious threats to Israel's peace and security.... As long as terror is raging ... this is not the appropriate time for talking about 'safe passage' between the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria. Our security comes first."

III. "A Debilitating Split"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 16): "The background to the split [in Fatah] was a power struggle between the veterans and the young guard, a struggle that has greatly intensified over the year that has passed since Yasser Arafat's death, which created a vacuum in the Palestinian leadership. With regard to their political positions, there is no real difference between the two groups.... The split greatly weakens Fatah, the Palestinian ruling party, and

threatens its status as the foremost party in Palestinian politics.... This development has major implications for the ability to stop Hamas's rise. There is no doubt that the younger candidates, who are popular with the public, are the only group that can block Hamas. Had Fatah's leaders been wise enough to integrate the young guard into their electoral slate, they would at least have had a chance to stop Hamas. Now, the situation appears more problematic. The two-headed campaign is liable to drive additional voters toward Hamas, thereby further disrupting the diplomatic process."

IV. "The Revolution of the Young Palestinians"

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 16): "The 'revolution of the young Palestinians' in Fatah, headed by Marwan Barghouti, which led to the defeat of Abu Mazen and the members of his generation, dealt a stinging defeat in the municipality elections on Thursday.... The young people, led by [Muhammad] Dahlan, [Sufian] Abu Zaida, and [Fares] Kadoura, with Marwan Barghouti behind them, pulling strings from his prison cell, will have to prove themselves in the more important campaign, against Hamas, and work towards a victory in the elections for the Legislative Council. With their youthful spirit, they are capable of winning. The big loser is Abu Mazen. He will remain the 'rais' of the Palestinians during his term of office, another four years, during which he will have to take the young people into consideration. The last stage that will mark the exchange of generations will come in other four years when Abu Mazen will end his term of office. After him the next 'rais' will be elected, perhaps Marwan Barghouti."

IV. "Strategic Unilateralism"

Dr. Jonathan Spyer, a research fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 16): "Despite the emerging contours of what one might call 'strategic unilateralism,' its elements are unlikely to be adorning election banners anytime soon. The reason for this is because 'unilateralism' involves the interaction of two partners. Those partners are Israel and the United States. The latter, however, has interests of its own which necessitate the appearance of progress toward bilateral agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. In difficult straits in Iraq, and influenced by the centrality placed on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in the political culture of the Arab world, the U.S. wants at least the impression of motion. The pressure placed on Israel to rapidly conclude the recent negotiations on the Rafah Crossing was a product of this. An Israeli attempt to impose a unilateral arrangement runs counter to such desires. It would represent the final foreclosing of international hopes for the imminent settlement of the conflict. That such hopes were themselves founded on an illusion of rapprochement remains too bitter a pill for the international community to swallow. Consequently, the Kadima party will fight the coming elections with vagaries and lip service to the road map. And if Ariel Sharon forms the next government, he will hope that the growing chaos on the Palestinian side will eventually become sufficiently apparent to Israel's closest ally to convince Washington that 'strategic unilateralism' is the best possible way to take the heat out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Further unilateral moves will then be presented as a regrettable response to an unavoidable reality."

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The international community -- as opposed to any individual country -- could exercise the military option.... What remains uncertain is whether such a decision will ever be reached."

Block Quotes:

"Is There a Military Option?"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 16): "Although President Bush says that

military action against Iran has not been dropped from the agenda, it is clear that Washington is not pursuing this track at the moment.... Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was right in acknowledging that the military option against Iran exists.... He never said anything about Israel. He was speaking about military intervention in general. In sum, the international community -- as opposed to any individual country -- could exercise the military option if a decision is made that Shi'ite Iran's status as a nuclear power poses an international danger or threatens the stability of the world, and not just the Middle East. What remains uncertain is whether such a decision will ever be reached."

13. Iraq:

Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The nature of [Iraq's government] coalition will ... largely determine whether the United States is able to set a timetable for withdrawing its forces from Iraq."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Though Iraqis and Palestinians may want 'a strong leader' ... they look to democracy as a system to protect them from despotic rule."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Shi'ites, Kurds Expected to Rule"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 16): "The most likely scenario [in the aftermath of the Iraqi parliamentary elections] is a victory for the liberal Shi'ite bloc headed by former prime minister Iyad Allawi ... and the formation of a strong coalition comprised of this group plus the Kurdish bloc, headed by President Jalal Talabani.... The nature of the coalition will also largely determine whether the United States is able to set a timetable for withdrawing its forces from Iraq. A coalition headed by Allawi and based on Kurdish support would presumably be 'security-oriented' and would favor a hard-line policy against rebellious districts. It would also try to repulse Iranian influence. In contrast, a government headed by [Ibrahim] Jafari, since it would include former Ba'athists, would be viewed as a national reconciliation government. Such a government might well restore relative tranquility to Iraq, but would also tend to cooperate closely with Iran."

II. "Arabs Want Democracy, Too"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 16): "In Iraq, despite the terrorism, a robust competition has emerged among real, if untested, political parties vying for influence in a real and free political process. Among Palestinians, there is no free press, and the 'parties' are essentially armed factions whose power derives as much from the bullet - both fired at Israelis and used to intimidate their own people -- as potentially from the ballot. Accordingly, just as many have been too quick to eulogize Iraqi democracy, they have been too quick to celebrate Palestinian democracy. In both cases, however, the popular desire for effective, accountable government has been demonstrated. Though Iraqis and Palestinians may want 'a strong leader,' they are hardly in the mood for corrupt and brutal dictators on the model of Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat, and they look to democracy as a system to protect them from despotic rule."

CRETZ